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ABSTRACT

This report explores the continued and intense interest in the nation's largest transfer of inner-city students to suburban high schools, that of the Boston (Massachusetts) metropolitan area. The Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunities (METCO) was established by black educators and parents in 1963 to offer students the opportunity to attend suburban schools. Participation in METCO, which soon began to receive state funds, is voluntary. Families of minority children in Boston can place their children on a waiting list for this program, which enrolls about 3,200 students in districts that have chosen to participate. The Harvard Project on School Desegregation studied the METCO program through surveys of the approximately 3,200 families participating in the 1995-96 school year. Research shows that these families are not social planners, but that their goals are very much like those of suburban parents. Academic goals overwhelm all other concerns. Neither parents nor students rank goals of interracial experience near the top of their objectives, but many do share these goals and think that they are being realized. Most families reported considerable satisfaction with METCO and the transfer experience, although many participants call for more diversity among teachers and curriculum. This report suggests that when superior educational opportunities are open, there is a strong demand for them among urban minority families. (Contains 17 tables.) (SLD)

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City-Suburban Desegregation

Parent and Student Perspectives in Metropolitan Boston

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

By Gary Orfield, with Jennifer Arenson, Tara Jackson, Christine Bohrer, Dawn Gavin, Emily Kalejs and many volunteers for the Harvard Project on School Desegregation

A Report by the Harvard Civil Rights Project
September 1997

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Acknowledgments

This report was possible only because of the cooperation of many people who enabled us to run a large project with very little money. We thank the METCO Directors and METCO Inc. for their cooperation, help in understanding the program, and work on convincing parents to full out questionnaires. Many graduate students at the Harvard Graduate School of Education helped with focus groups and questionnaire development and testing.

Out-of-pocket costs were paid from my Spencer Foundation Senior Scholar Grant, from the Taubman Center on State and Local Government, from the MacArthur Foundation's startup grant for the Harvard Civil Rights Project and from contributions by volunteers. In first two years of the Harvard-METCO Fellows program we thank the dedicated and excellent graduate student teachers and acknowledge the special leadership of Julie Altshuler, Charles Abelman and Marina McCarthy as well as the supplies contributed by the Education School's Office of External Relations and Programs in Professional Development. We greatly appreciate the opportunity to work with a wonderfully interesting group of students who came to do more work at Harvard on Saturday mornings after long weeks of commuting to suburban schools and who taught us much about the METCO experience.

The Kennedy School's Taubman Center on State and Local Government was actively involved in the project. Most critically it helped pay for the Work Study students and provided space for the work on the survey's data. Several members of the Taubman Center community, including David Luberoff and Bill Parent were also involved in weekend seminars for METCO students that took place at Harvard on Saturday mornings and greatly deepened our understanding of student experiences.

Although no researcher would recommend carrying out a big study without a budget, the experience clearly showed the good will and hope for a better interracial future that is shared by many young people willing to contribute their work to this effort. This project tapped a surprisingly deep and durable reservoir of hope by parents, students, suburban educators, and graduate students about opening up opportunity in our finest public schools. In many ways, that support more than made up for the difficulties we encountered.

Executive Summary

This report explores the reason for the persistence and intense interest in the nation's oldest large-scale transfer of inner city students to suburban high schools. Why do thousands of families wait on long lists in the hope of sending their children to exactly the kind of program widely described as useless social planning--long-distance one-way busing to schools where their children will often be part of a tiny minority of nonwhite students? The eagerness to participate is shown by the fact that more than a fourth of the students were registered for the program before they were one year old and most families do not express a preference for any particular district--they simply want the suburban opportunity. Thousands are on the waiting list for the spots. The fact that this program has operated since 1963 in the city that had the nation's most polarized and bitter desegregation conflict--Boston--is deserving of attention but no serious research on this has been done for a quarter century.

METCO, the Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunities, was established by black parents and educators in 1963 to offer students an opportunity to attend suburban schools and soon began to receive state funds. All districts and all families participate voluntarily. Families of minority children from Boston can place them on a long waiting list to be eligible for this program which enrolls about 3200 students in suburban school districts which have chosen to participate in this voluntary program. Students enroll through the downtown METCO office and each district appoints a METCO Director to run the program within the receiving district. The state budget supports the program but the state contribution had declined substantially in constant value dollars in the past decade.

The Harvard Project on School Desegregation, now part of the Harvard Civil Rights Project, undertook this research during the 1995-96 school year, surveying all of the approximately 3200 families of the children participating in the program. Later a parallel study was carried out of the students at three of the high schools. The research could not answer all of the major questions but it does clearly show why families are eager to participate, what they hope will come of it, what their experiences have been, and how they think it could be improved.

The research shows that the families are not social planners. Their goals are very much like that of suburban parents. They want the best possible education for their children and they are willing to make great sacrifices to get it. Academic goals overwhelm other concerns. Almost three-fourths of parents say that suburban academic offerings are a "most important" reason for enrolling their child in METCO.

Although neither the parents nor the students rank goals of interracial experience anywhere near the top, many do share those goals and the vast majority are convinced that they are realized to a very considerable degree. 49% of parents say it has been an excellent experience in learning "how to get along with people from different backgrounds and 43% more say the experience has been "good" while only five of 2409 parents point to serious problems.

Critics of desegregation plans often say that they prevent parent participation by taking the kids away from home. That is not the experience of the METCO parents. Most who have also had

children in Boston schools say they participate at the same level. More report higher participation than lower and 70% report attending parent meetings, much higher than many inner city schools.

Some critics also point to the brain drain from inner city schools caused by desegregation plans and claim that desegregation only benefits affluent minority families. In fact our data shows few high income families (just one ninth over $60,000 family income). Almost a fifth have family incomes below $20,000, The most common income in the program is from $20-$30,0000 in a metropolitan area with a high cost of living. It is not an elitist program.

Nor is a likely that the "brain drain" of the best prepared METCO students would come back if METCO ended. When asked whether or not ending METCO would bring their child back to a regular Boston Public School, only one-fourth of all parents say yes. A fifth of METCO families say they would move out of the city Boston. A remarkable number, almost two-thirds, say that they would prefer to become part of suburbia, to live where their child goes to school if their were affordable housing.

Most families report very positive experiences with teachers, administrators and METCO program officials and very little serious discrimination. They are pleased with the academic program their children receive. On the other hand, large numbers report that they encounter "some" discrimination from other students and various school officials.

The principal need for improvement raised in the surveys is a call for more diversity in teachers and curriculum. Very large majorities of parents and students support this call. Basically it is an desire not for return to a segregated environment but for the evolution of virtually all-white schools to more integrated institutions with nonwhite educators and mentors and a curriculum that helps the city children and the suburban children understand the struggle and the contributions of African American and other peoples of color to American history and culture.

The report suggests that when genuinely superior educational opportunities are open there is an extremely strong demand for them among minority families, much more than METCO can accommodate. It also shows that many of the criticisms of the "harms of desegregation" are not felt by the families participating, who clearly believe that there are clear costs but also very large gains.

The report calls for further research and study of the overall program to answer questions this study could not address. Since the program meets an obvious and intense demand and operates on purely voluntary principles, there is great parent and student satisfaction with the academic results, and the cost per students is far less than that of charter schools, it deserves to be considered as an important part of the expansion of choice now under way in Massachusetts schools. The strong consensus among parents on the issues that could produce a more effective program suggest a need to focus leadership, resources, recruitment and training on strengthening the diversity of the schools and their curriculum and the possible positive impacts on both minority and white students.

At a time when desegregation plans are being terminated in many cities and when Boston is often described as the worst failure of the effort to integrate American public schools, a 34 year-old program of voluntary desegregation between Boston and its suburbs is thriving and is wholly unable to keep up with demand. The program—the Metropolitan Council on Educational Opportunities or METCO,--requires long waits and large sacrifices form families. Many of the 3200 city children enrolled in outlying suburban communities endure very long bus trips to attend schools where they are part of a tiny and sometimes isolated minority while losing some old friends at home.

Why do the parents and students take on the burdens of this program and face the inevitable difficulties of attending school in a very different district far from home and friends? Do they experience the discrimination and alienation critics attribute to such desegregation program or is the experience a sign of more hopeful racial attitudes in Boston's metropolitan society? Do the families find what they hoped for in their METCO experience?

Some strong central themes come through in the responses from students and parents alike. The basic message is that parents and students see METCO as a small but vitally important opportunity to obtain the kind of educational opportunity rarely available to inner city minority children. Though the family sacrifices are high, the benefits seem much higher. The gains in quality of education seem unambiguous to METCO parents and students. Although these students may not be academic stars in their suburban schools, they report a solid grounding in very

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competitive schools, comfort in moving across racial lines, and a virtually unanimous intention of completing college.

Families also report success on a secondary goal--learning to live and work in a diverse interracial setting. The ride is not a smooth one. Many families confront discrimination in some aspects of their experience and there are often limitations within interracial friendships. Overall, however, the experience of serious discrimination is very uncommon in most aspects of the program, and many parents and students report no discrimination at all in some parts of their METCO experience.

The parent responses also undercut a frequent criticism of long-distance desegregation, namely that the parents of bussed students cannot be involved in the new school and that their home communities lose their talents. In fact, parents report that they tend to be slightly more involved in the suburban schools than in the city schools their children have attended. The great majority also report that they would not have their child enrolled in or participate in their local Boston public school if METCO were terminated. In fact, at least a fifth would plan to leave the city altogether. If these plans were carried out, the central city's regular schools would gain little and the city itself might totally lose a number of very active and concerned citizens.

METCO is not seen as a finished work, and both parents and students see important areas for improvement. The key concerns include more faculty diversity, educational programs that better reflect the diverse cultures of the students, more training in racial understanding for faculty and staff, and METCO parent representation in school district policy making. In our discussions with METCO administrators, we found broad awareness

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of many of these needs and regret that reduced state funding has cut resources for addressing them. Most of the problems relate to the fact that in this relatively small, voluntary program, the suburban schools tend to remain white schools with white faculties and staffs with only small groups of city minority students. METCO families express the greatest support for policies that would build integration into the core of the schools themselves, creating schools that are more truly integrated.

The policies they favor would be policies that could well have the effect of giving suburban white students a more substantial experience with diversity as well as enriching the experience of METCO students. If integration is understood as the coming together of students and educators of diverse races and cultures in a situation of mutual respect and mutual learning, then these issues are critical for the goal of true integration.

The Survey. We can answer some of the important questions because of a large survey of all METCO parents conducted by the Harvard Project for School Desegregation in all of the suburban districts. This survey had a very high response rate and thus we can speak with considerable confidence about the motivations and experiences of METCO parents. This information is supplemented by data from a subsequent and parallel study of students in three of the districts and by what we learned from working with groups of METCO high school students who took part in special Saturday seminars in the Harvard-METCO Fellows program during the past two of these sources, and each adds important dimensions.

The Survey results and consideration of the differences between the city and the METCO desegregation programs suggest some possible reasons for the intense interest in enrolling in

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METCO in spite of the obvious difficulties and limitations of the program. What explains such success in the face of the Boston area's reputation for racism since South Boston's bitter resistance to school desegregation.

The first may be that METCO offers a far more tangible gain for students in terms of quality of education and the ability to network into higher education through excellent schools in METCO than was present in most of the city's desegregation experiences. Unlike Boston's plan, METCO does not produce an intense racial struggle for access to a very limited number of seats in schools with strong achievement scores. Boston contains about one-eleventh of the students in the metropolitan area but only one of the region's nationally respected college prep public schools--Boston Latin--which is currently being sued by white parents for the second time in two years.

Middle class suburban whites are not in competition for jobs, neighborhoods, and competitive schooling with large groups of minority families and they do not fear racial transition from spreading ghettos and barrios as many less affluent urban residents of ethnic neighborhoods do. Suburban residents may see less threat and much more opportunity in interracial experiences for their children.

The fact that METCO was launched by black parents and educators may have built in some sensitivities that are not present in most court-ordered remedies. Both the city office, METCO Inc., and the suburban METCO directors in each district obviously play a vital role and are highly regarded by METCO parents.

Greater Boston as a community, then, may have more hopeful prospects for improving race relations than observers of the

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city's busing struggle recognized. It may be that one result of focusing the pressure of racial change where the conditions were most conflictual and the possible gains for minority students the most limited, has been inability to consider other far more attainable goals.

METCO is a small program and the state budget becomes less adequate each year for even maintaining the existing program. Important support services have had to be drastically reduced. We believe that the evidence here justifies serious consideration of a substantial expansion of these opportunities. The survey also clearly identifies deficiencies and sets out an agenda to improve a program that already enjoys strong support.

This is the first of what we hope will be a series of reports and studies from our survey. We have data which permits, for instance, study of each individual districts since we did a census of the entire parent population rather than a sample, thus permitting valid district-level conclusions. It is also very important, of course, to study issues that cannot be fully addressed through surveys, particularly the academic progress of students in METCO schools and the conditions under which the potential gains are most likely to be realized. It would also be invaluable to have research on the impacts on the schools, the local students, suburban educators and the many suburban families who have been involved with METCO as host families and in other ways.

Background. METCO, (the Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunities) began more than a third of a century ago, in 1963, as a voluntary effort to send interested students to suburban school districts willing to accept them. The program was initiated by a group of black parents and teachers and evolved

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into METCO Inc., the organization currently directing the program together with suburban school districts and the Massachusetts Department of Education. This program, initiated at the height of the civil rights movement, was a rare attempt to begin to break down the walls of racial separation within a large metropolitan area. When the Massachusetts state legislature passed its pioneering policy for school integration, the 1965 Racial Imbalance Act, it also agreed to assume the budget of the METCO effort beginning in 1966. At that time 220 students attended schools in the suburbs through METCO in contrast to the 3200 currently in the program.

Few programs has survived the kind of wild changes that hit the METCO program shortly after its founding. Within a few years, the civil rights movement was divided and its great hero, Martin Luther King was assassinated. Urban riots and the Black Power movement undermined the hope for integration and the political reaction that brought four presidents to the White House who were active critics of urban school desegregation and promised to change the pro-desegregation decisions of the federal courts through appointments of conservative judges. In Boston, METCO lasted through the extreme racial polarization of the city in the 1970s and the state's severe fiscal crisis in the late 1980s, though it was reduced then.

METCO was created as a program to permit black Bostonians to enroll in suburban districts. For many years it has had a large waiting lists and great numbers of families sign up for any available spot. There are currently about 7000 students on the waiting list. The program is now open to Latino and Asian students, but has relatively few so far.

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Thirty-four years after its founding and 31 years after state funding began, the program is still very much in operation and demand is so intense that only a small proportion of interested families can be served. At a time when the remaining elements of the Boston desegregation plan are under attack in court, this positive experience has received little serious attention. Dramatic racial confrontations on the street and demagogic racial politics are considered inherently newsworthy. While quiet year-after-year experience in interracial schools a few miles away is rarely covered. Similarly, though African Americans have consistently favored integrated education by huge majorities over the past four decades, to cite another example, African American critics of desegregation are usually given much more publicity than supporters. Critics views are taken as a sign that public opinion is shifting even though the polls show black criticism of busing peaked a quarter century ago and pro-integration sentiment is stronger now.[1]

The obvious effect of such selective publicity is to make racial problems appear to be far more intractable than they are. This research is intended to help redress the imbalance in public information by giving voice to the experiences of thousands of Boston minority families whose children attend suburban white schools. That experience provides a dramatically different perspective on the possibilities of desegregation in the Boston area and offers the opportunity to replace hunches and stereotypes about the families participating in city-suburban desegregation with their own reports of motivations and experiences.

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[1]Gary Orfield, "Public Opinion and School Desegregation," Teachers College Record, (Summer 1995).

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THE METCO STUDY. This report, the first based on a massive survey of METCO parents undertaken in the 1995-96 school year and a 1996 survey of METCO students at three high schools with METCO programs, answers a number of key questions about the program and the families who participate in the student transfers.

The METCO parent and student surveys sprung from a request from the METCO Directors Association to the Harvard Project on School Desegregation for an assessment of the oldest voluntary city-suburban desegregation transfer program in the U.S. The METCO program has been operating much longer than the mandatory desegregation plan in Boston about which so much has been written. (That plan has been converted to a complex "controlled choice" plan operated under the control of the local school board and is now facing the second recent legal challenge.) All the families and districts in METCO participate voluntarily and this very different approach deserves analysis.

The program has rarely been studied, in part because of an extraordinary national controversy over the article "The Evidence on Busing" published by David Armor in 1972. That study of the early years of METCO became the first major academic critique of urban school desegregation and commanded extraordinary national attention for its claims that busing was a failed policy. Its author became the nation's leading academic opponent of school desegregation plans and a fierce debate over his claims erupted in the scholarly world. After that experience, METCO officials initiated no significant studies for 23 years, until 1995, when they asked our project to conduct research.

The Armor study attempted to follow students over a two year period, comparing them with siblings left behind in Boston. The study, conducted at the peak of the Black Power movement and amid

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great tensions in Boston over school desegregation, concluded that there were no clear test score gains from the transfers, that students tended to become more in favor of attending black schools and more identified with race-conscious ideologies while in METCO, that race relations did not improve, and that black students became less confident about their relative academic standing in the suburban school. The conclusions were not entirely negative--Armor noted that black and white students were strongly in favor of the program even at that time and almost no one left it. He reported that the suburban schools did tend to "channel" black students into much better colleges. He argued, though, that black opinion was turning against integration and that the courts were mistaken to assume that it would produce gains for blacks.

Armor's study was fiercely attacked by other social scientists who pointed to massive methodological problems, including the fact that many of Armor's "control group" of city children were actually not attending ghetto schools but were being bussed to desegregated schools within the city.

The article received headline coverage across the U.S. and was almost immediately used by the Nixon Administration and its congressional supporters in their efforts to limit or reverse court-ordered desegregation. Armor testified for such measures in Congress and later ran for office on this issue.[2] It was the beginning of the oft-repeated media claim that research has shown that busing is a failure. After this experience, it is not surprising that little research was done on METCO for many years.

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[2]U.S. Senate, Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, Subcommittee on Education, *Hearings, Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1972*, 92nd Congress, 2d Sess., 1972, pp. 1194-1204; he was elected to the Los Angeles school board but defeated in a big for Congress.

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It is, however, impossible to assess and improve a program as complicated and decentralized as METCO without systematically collecting data. Confronted with wildly contradictory claims about the value of school desegregation and a steady decline in the inflation-adjusted state budget for the program, METCO leaders asked us to study the program. Since the METCO Directors had no funding we decided to work closely with them in conducting what may be the largest unfunded study of school parents in the U.S. Many graduate students and the project director conducted focus groups, drafted and field tested survey questions and prepared the survey. We agreed to design and analyze the survey without cost if the METCO leaders guaranteed us a high response rate, something critical for valid generalizations but very hard to obtain in parent surveys. Rather than conduct a sample survey which would not permit detailed analysis at the district level, we decided to survey every parent, producing a survey almost twice as large as many national surveys. Through many extraordinary efforts to reach parents, we obtained an excellent response rate of 75%, or 2409 parents. It is notoriously difficult to obtain a high response rate in parent surveys and the METCO leaders deserve a great deal of credit for their repeated effort to persuade the parents to submit the surveys which were then sent to our office for analysis.

A data set was created from the surveys by volunteers and Work Study students, with the advice of Tara Jackson, a sociologist and survey research expert serving as a post-doctoral fellow in the Joint Center for Housing Studies at the Kennedy School. During this same period a student survey of METCO students at three schools was developed and implemented by Jennifer Arenson of the Graduate School of Education. Many of

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the findings of her study reinforce the findings of the parent survey, though student and parents differ on a few issues. Though Arenson studied only three districts, the results are very revealing.

Findings

Strong Demand. The parent survey data shows that there is an intense interest in the METCO program shared by a diverse group of Boston parents, reflected in the fact that more than a fourth of METCO students are registered for the program before they are one year old. (See Table 1) The program operates with very little publicity about the opportunities because it is never able to meet the urgent requests of many families already. When asked how they found out about METCO a substantial portion of the parents said that they "had always known" about the program. 42% of the parents said that the experience of friends already in the

Table 1

Child Age At METCO Registration

	NUMBER	PERCENT
UNDER THE AGE OF 1	619	25.7
AGES 1-5	930	38.6
AGES 6-11	598	24.8
AGES 12-17	135	5.6
MISSING DATA	127	5.3
TOTAL	2409	100.0

program was a very important or a most important reason for their decision. METCO Inc. reports a current waiting list of approximately 7000, more than twice the size of the current program. The chronic shortage of spaces in METCO does, of course impose many limitations on the program and limits the outreach to families since the program already has far more demand than it can handle. Another sign of the intensity of the demand was the

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fact that many parents said that they were willing to transfer their child to any available suburban METCO district. When applying for the program almost two-thirds of the parents did not request any specific district. (See table 2)

Table 2
Did Parent Request Enrollment in Specific District?

	NUMBER	PERCENT
YES	833	34.6
NO	1547	64.2
MISSING DATA	29	1.2
TOTAL	2409	100.0

METCO families are sometimes described as an elite group. In the minds of some critics, this means that the program is not really reaching families who most deserve this kind of help. Other city-oriented critics attack it as a brain drain of top students and their families from city schools.

METCO parents, in fact, cover a wide range of backgrounds and incomes. Most of the METCO parent respondents had at least some college education, about a fourth were college graduates and an eighth had graduate or professional degrees. (See Table 3)

Table 3
METCO Parent Respondent's Highest Level of Education

	NUMBER	PERCENT
GRADE SCHOOL	19	.8
SOME HIGH SCHOOL	72	3.0
HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE	289	12.0
TECHNICAL/BUSINESS SCHOOL TRAINING	277	11.5
SOME COLLEGE	835	34.7

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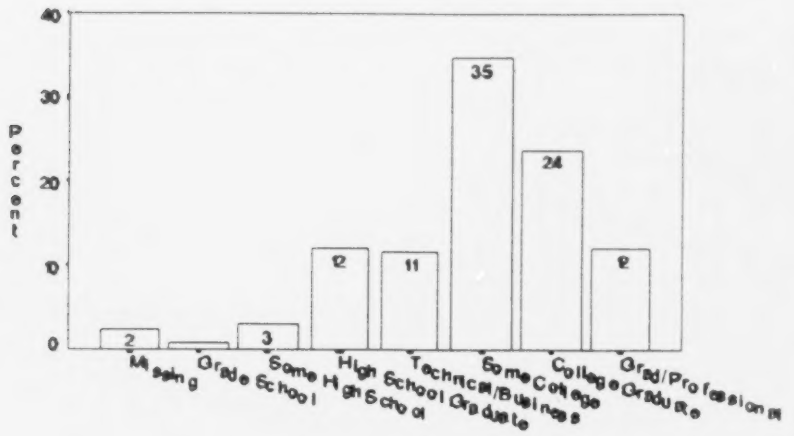
COLLEGE GRADUATE	572	23.7
GRADUATE/PROFESSIONAL	288	12.0



Almost half (45%) were graduates of the Boston Public Schools and a tenth (9.6%) had attended METCO schools themselves. (Table 4)

Table 4
Where METCO Parent Respondent Received Most Of Their Pre-College Education

	NUMBER	PERCENT
BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS	1083	45.0
METCO SCHOOLS	230	9.6
ANOTHER COUNTRY	452	18.7
PRIVATE INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS	117	4.8
SUBURBAN PUBLIC SCHOOLS	94	3.9
OTHER U.S. PUBLIC SCHOOLS	362	14.9
CATHOLIC/RELIGIOUS SCHOOLS	155	6.4

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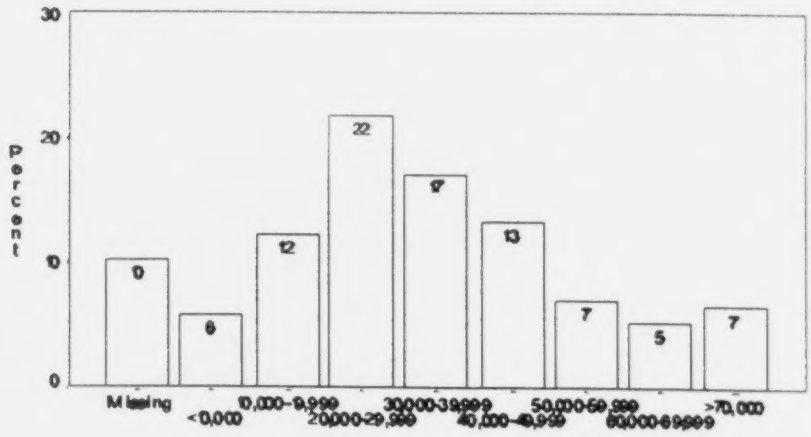
MISSING DATA	118	4.9
TOTAL	N/A	N/A

Few METCO families are affluent, though there is a wide range of incomes. One eighth had incomes over $60,000, one-fifth had household incomes below $20,000 and the most commonly reported income was between $20,000 and $30,000, (see table 5) an average black family income range for the Northeast.[3]

Table 5
Household Income

	NUMBER	PERCENT
<10,000	142	5.9
10,000-19,999	296	12.3
20,000-29,999	523	21.7
30,000-39,999	415	17.2
40,000-49,999	325	13.5
50,000-59,999	170	7.1
60,000-69,999	130	5.4
>70,000	159	6.6
NOT REPORTED	249	10.3



[3] *Statistical Abstract of the United States 1995 (Washington: GPO, 1995), p.476*

There was considerable diversity in racial and ethnic background. 71% were reported to be Black, 3% were Haitian, 12% were West Indian, 5% Cape Verdean, 4% Puerto Rican, 2% Dominican, and 4% Central or South American. About a fifth of Black children and larger shares of several other groups reported mixed ethnic backgrounds.

Table 6
Child's Race/Ethnicity

	TOTAL PERCENT	ONLY ONE RACE/ETHNICITY MENTIONED	MORE THAN ONE RACE/ETHNICITY MENTIONED
BLACK	71.3	57.2	14.2
HAITIAN	3.3	2.2	1.1
WEST INDIAN	18.3	12.0	6.3
AFRICAN	2.1	1.0	1.1
CAPE VERDEAN	4.6	1.2	3.4
PUERTO RICAN	4.4	1.6	2.8
DOMINICAN	1.9	.9	1.0
CUBAN	.3	.1	.2
MEXICAN	.1	.0	.1
CENTRAL/SOUTH AMERICAN	4.3	2.5	1.8
NATIVE AMERICAN	3.6	.5	3.1
WHITE	2.2	.2	2.0
CHINESE	.7	.5	.2
VIETNAMESE	.2	.2	.0
FILIPINO	.2	.0	.2
KOREAN	.2	.1	.1
EAST INDIAN	.5	.2	.3
OTHER	2.8	N/A	N/A

Total number of cases: 2363

*Respondents were instructed to select as many choices as were appropriate.

Academic Gains. The basic reasons why parents enrolled their children in METCO were academic, though other issues, including

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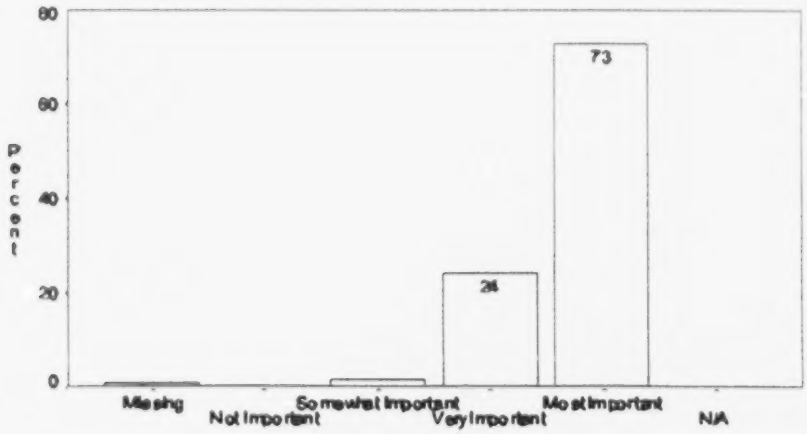
safety and desire for interracial experience were also important. Parents basically sought a better educational experience than they thought their children would otherwise obtain and better preparation for college. 73% ranked the academic program as the "most important" reason for their decision.(see table 7).

Table 7
Importance of Academic Program in Parents' Decision To Enroll Child In METCO

	NUMBER	PERCENT
NOT IMPORTANT	7	.3
SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT	39	1.6
VERY IMPORTANT	589	24.4
MOST IMPORTANT	1750	72.6
NOT APPLICABLE	1	.0
MISSING DATA	23	1.0
	2409	100.0



Armor found that parents had the same basic motivation in the 1960s and research on desegregation has consistently shown that the basic reason for support from minority families is the belief that it will produce access to better education. In fact, of

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course, many of Boston's suburban school districts do show much higher levels of outcomes than city schools. Some of the substantial METCO programs, for example are in Newton, Brookline, Concord, Wellesley, Wayland, Belmont, and Lexington. Table 8 shows the average SAT score for these districts compared to Boston.[4]

Table 8

SAT Scores in Boston and Selected Suburban Districts, 1995

Boston	**740**
Newton	**1059**
Concord	**1044**
Brookline	**1013**
Lexington	**1077**
Wayland	**1051**
Wellesley	**1058**
Belmont	**1056**

Source: Educational Testing Service Data, Massachusetts School District Profiles, in Boston Globe, April 21, 1996.

City critics assume that without METCO, these families would put their children and their energy into local Boston schools. Though it is impossible to know in advance what would happen, that would certainly not be the plan of most METCO parents. When asked what they would do if METCO was not available, only one-fourth of the METCO parents said that they would enroll their child in a local Boston school and another fourth said that they would seek a magnet or exam school. Half said they would send their children to parochial or private schools.

[4]These differences are only one very limited measure of a school district and are much more related to the family background of the students than to the nature of a school district's program. Differing proportions of students from various districts are tested and the tests measure only certain skills and abilities. Nonetheless they do show that transferring students gain access to districts with much higher levels of competition and a large group of student peers who are on the path for admission to competitive colleges and universities.

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We do not know how many would be admitted to the exam schools and the private schools and how many families could actually pay the costs of the private and parochial schools. What is clear from this question, however, is that Boston public schools could not automatically get back the students and parents who could help make them more competitive. In fact, those most likely to come back would be the lowest income METCO group who have the fewest choices and the most educational problems.

Distance and Parent Participation. Worse yet, Boston communities might lose parents who are actively involved in other aspects of community life. 20% of the METCO parents said that they would probably or definitely move out of Boston if METCO were not available for their children and only 50% said that they would definitely remain. Opponents of school desegregation have won many of their cases, in part, by convincing courts that desegregation produces white flight. In Boston an end of desegregation in the future might trigger loss of substantial numbers of black middle class families.

Living close to the schools is assumed to be strongly related to parent involvement in many of the recent arguments for terminating desegregation plans. Anyone who has had a child enrolled in a well-organized but distant private school or magnet school knows, of course, that this is an oversimplification. Research shows that the primary predictor of parent involvement is the parent's social and economic status and that the nature and efficacy of parent involvement tend to be far lower in high poverty schools.[5]

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[5]Bernard Michael, ed., *Volunteers in Public Schools*, Washington, National Academy Press, 1990; pp. 20-21, 109, and Annette Laurie, *Home Advantage*, Falmer Press,

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Parents report high participation in METCO schools. For those who had also had children in the Boston public schools only one-tenth reported less involvement in the suburban school but one- seventh said they actually participated more. Nine-tenths reported attending METCO Inc. parent meetings in the city. 80% had been to parent meetings in the suburban district, 70% had helped in fund raising for their suburban school's projects, and 27% said that they had assisted with teams or activities in the suburbs.(table 9) Large majorities said that they had urged policy makers to support METCO.(table 10)

Table 9
Parent Participation in METCO and School Functions

	Attend METCO, Inc. Parent Meetings	Participate in Fundraising at Suburban School	Attend P.T.A. Meetings in Suburban School	Work with Student Teams/ Activities
	PERCENT	PERCENT	PERCENT	PERCENT
YES	91.4	69.6	80.6	27.3
NO	6.5	25.2	14.9	66.0
MISSING DATA	2.0	5.2	4.4	6.7
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 10
Parents Who Urged Policy Makers To Continue Funding for METCO

	NUMBER	PERCENT
YES	1632	67.7
NO	651	27.0
MISSING DATA	126	5.2
TOTAL	2409	100.0

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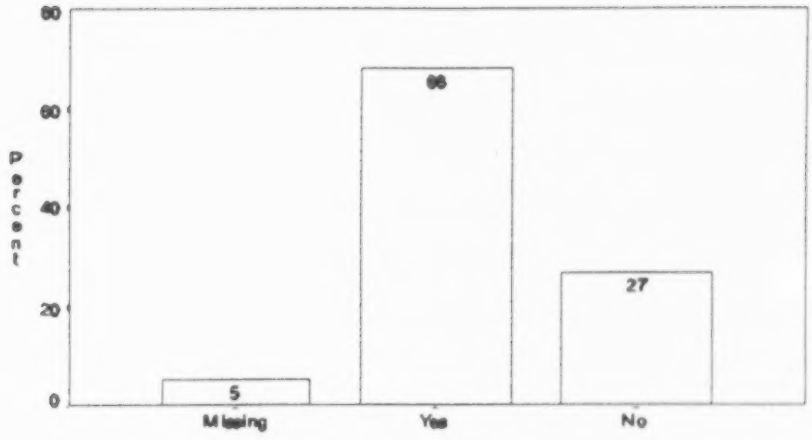

General Parent Satisfaction. METCO parents had criticisms and suggestions for improvement of the program but basically ranked it very positively. The basic view is that the program has real costs for students and families and could be substantially strengthened, but that it offers a vital set of opportunities related to important goals of parents for their children. There is strong satisfaction with the basic academic opportunities. 79% said their childrens' teachers were excellent or good even though the students had few nonwhite teachers.(table 11)

Table 11
Satisfaction with Suburban School's Teachers:

	NUMBER	PERCENT
SERIOUS PROBLEMS	21	.9
SOME PROBLEMS	427	17.7
GOOD	947	39.3
EXCELLENT	957	39.7
DON'T KNOW	20	.8
MISSING DATA	37	1.5
TOTAL	2409	

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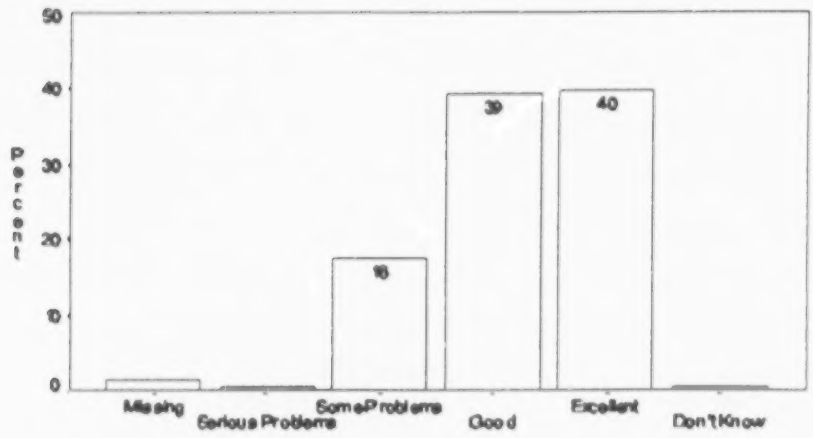

Racial Attitudes. Although good race relations was not the primary goal of METCO families, there was a very high level of satisfaction that the program was working along that dimension.. 92% of said that their children had had an excellent or good experience in "learning to get along with people from different backgrounds."(table 12). The existing longitudinal studies of desegregation programs suggest that this and the closely related issues of tying into traditionally white networks of opportunity and mobility account for many of the long-term gains.[9]

[9]Amy Stuart Wells and Robert L. Crain, "Perpetuation Theory and the Long-Term Effects of School Desegregation," *Review of Educational Research*, vol. 64, no. 4 (Winter 1994); Eric M. Camburn, "College Completion Among Students from High Schools Located in Large Metropolitan Areas, *American Journal of Education*, vol. 98, no. 4 (August 1990), pp. 551-69.

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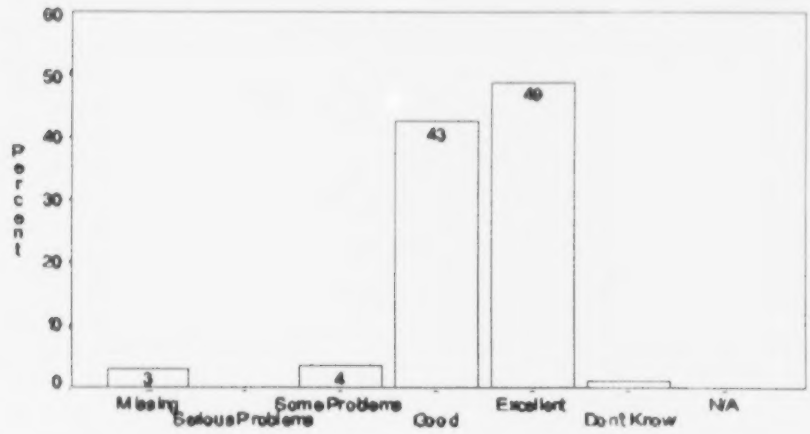
Table 12
Parent Level of Satisfaction with
How Well Child Has Learned To Get Along With People From Different Backgrounds

	NUMBER	PERCENT
SERIOUS PROBLEMS	5	.2
SOME PROBLEMS	87	3.6
GOOD	1027	42.6
EXCELLENT	1175	48.8
DON'T KNOW	36	1.5
NOT APPLICABLE	1	.0
MISSING DATA	78	3.2
TOTAL	2409	100.0



Though many of their top priorities for possible improvement related to racial and cultural issues, 74% of parents said that there had been excellent or good respect for their childrens' culture in the suburban school. (see table 13).

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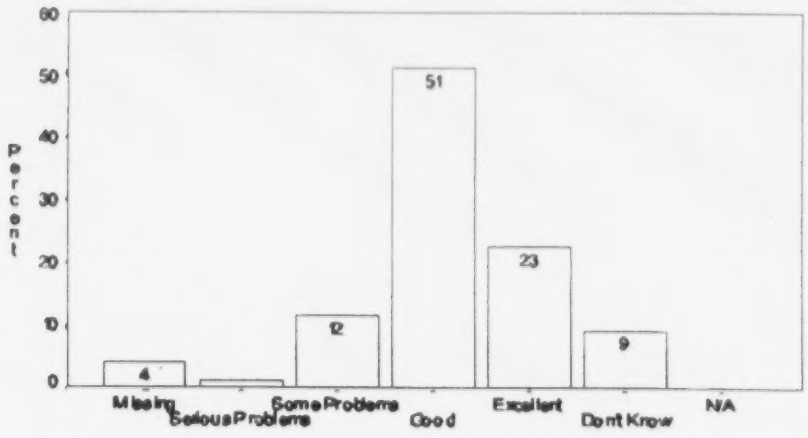
Table 13
Parent Level of Satisfaction with
How Well the Child's Culture is Respected in Suburban School

	NUMBER	PERCENT
SERIOUS PROBLEMS	27	1.1
SOME PROBLEMS	279	11.6
GOOD	1230	51.1
EXCELLENT	550	22.8
DON'T KNOW	225	9.3
NOT APPLICABLE	1	.0
MISSING DATA	97	4.0
TOTAL	2409	100.0



Parents were also pleased with the METCO organization. Both the METCO Directors in each suburban school district, and METCO

Inc., the system's central office, recruiting and tutoring center. They try to buffer the problems in the process and to support the transfer students. 87% of parents reported a positive experience with the METCO Director in their child's school district.(table 14). They reported serious involvement with METCO Inc. and strong approval of the programs, the METCO operated transportation, and the tutoring programs.(see table 15).

Table 14
Satisfaction with the Child's METCO Coordinator/Director

	NUMBER	PERCENT
SERIOUS PROBLEMS	22	.9
SOME PROBLEMS	113	4.7
GOOD	971	40.3
EXCELLENT	1129	46.9
DON'T KNOW	90	3.7
NOT APPLICABLE	1	.0
MISSING DATA	83	3.4
TOTAL	2409	100.0

Table 15
Satisfaction with METCO, Inc. Operated Transportation, Summer School and Tutoring

	METCO Summer School	METCO Tutorial/Test Preparation	Bus Driver	Bus Monitor
	PERCENT	PERCENT	PERCENT	PERCENT
SERIOUS PROBLEMS	.9	1.0	1.9	2.0
SOME PROBLEMS	4.2	5.5	13.2	12.5
GOOD	26.0	31.1	48.7	40.6
EXCELLENT	14.8	16.4	26.1	25.9
DON'T KNOW	38.7	32.4	6.1	11.1
NOT APPLICABLE	5.3	3.9	1.0	2.7
MISSING DATA	10.1	9.8	2.9	5.4
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Parents reported surprisingly little serious discrimination, though many felt that there had been some. 2% thought there had been

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serious discrimination by administrators and staff, while 61% said there had been none. 4% saw serious teacher discrimination while 50% saw none. 4% said that there was serious discrimination by students while 38% said that there had been none. Parents felt that there was very little discrimination was reported by suburban adults or the police or bus drivers. The low level of reports of "serious" discrimination should not, of course, be taken as a justification for things as they are. On most dimensions large numbers of parents reported "some" discrimination.(table 16) Our limited survey made it impossible to explore these issues in depth but they deserve close study by METCO staff, and suburban school officials and teachers. Any form of actual or perceived discrimination diminishes the program and should be a focus of leadership and staff training in the schools.

Table 16
Parents' Views of
Discrimination Faced By Students In Suburban School/Community

	From Teachers	From Administrators/ Staff	From Other Students In School
	Percent	Percent	Percent
NONE	49.9	61.1	38.1
SOME	32.3	18.8	45.1
SERIOUS	3.6	2.3	3.8
DON'T KNOW	12.0	14.7	11.6
NOT APPLICABLE	.0	.0	.0
MISSING DATA	2.2	3.1	1.3
	100.0	100.0	100.0

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Table 16A
Discrimination Faced From Teachers

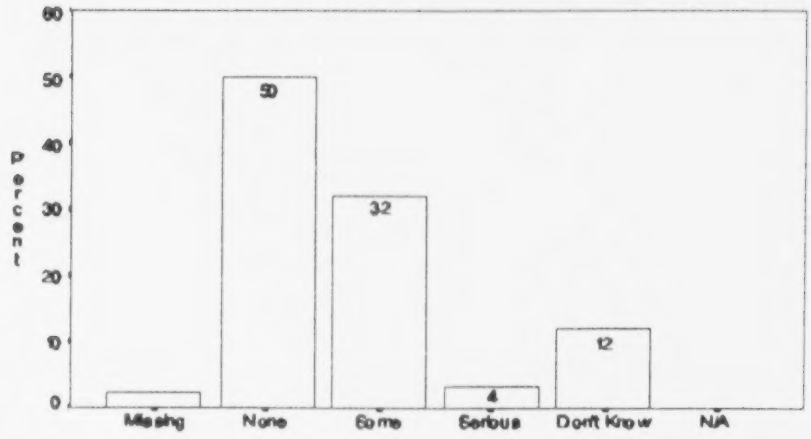

Chart 16b
Discrimination Faced From School Administrators/Staff

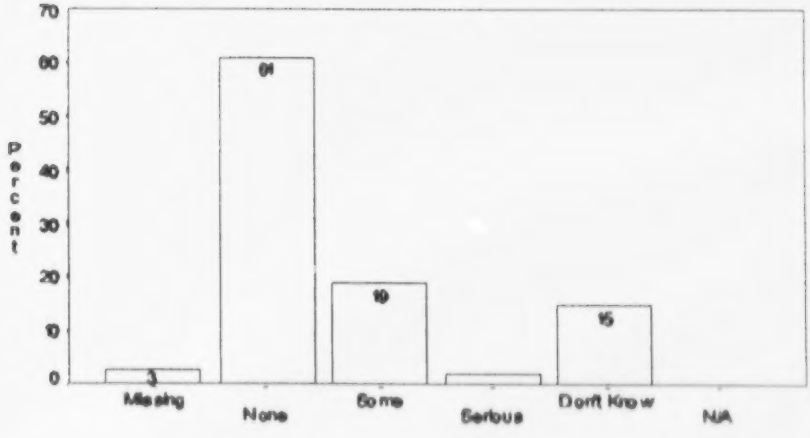

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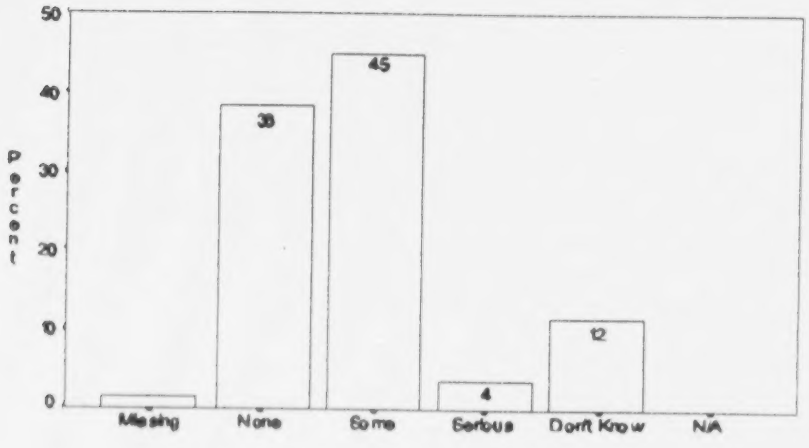
Chart 16c
Discrimination Faced From Other Students In School



These suggestions came as ways to make a very positive experience better. Parents who are ready to make great sacrifices to see to it that their children have a better opportunity to make it in the mainstream of a primarily suburban society where education increasingly determines status, also want their children to understand and respect the historical and cultural background of their community.

One question that showed both the strength of parent interest in suburban opportunities and the need to expand the METCO discussion to other closely related issues was shown by a question about housing. 64% of METCO parents said that they "would live in the suburban community" where their child attended school "if housing was affordable." he average American family moves every six years and families with young children move more often. Since METCO began the average house or apartment has changed hands six

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times and many new suburban communities have been constructed from farm and forest land, yet residential and school segregation have expanded. The Massachusetts "Anti-Snob Zoning" law has resulted in thousands of affordable housing units in suburban developments but there has been no mechanism to link this housing to METCO families who might wish to live in it.[7] The absence of effective mobility programs is one reason we now have second generation METCO parents and why the strong desire of most METCO parents to share in the full life of suburban communities is continually frustrated. Many critics of busing ask why we don't solve the underlying problem of housing segregation. Most METCO parents would echo that question.

Table 17
Would Live In Suburban Community Where Child Attends School
If Housing Was Affordable

	NUMBER	PERCENT
YES	1535	63.7
NO	762	31.6
MISSING DATA	112	4.6
TOTAL	2409	100.0

[7] Our study did not examine this program but similar programs elsewhere have rarely served city minority families unless this was a specific goal. Chicago's suburban housing mobility program has produced major benefits for minority families according to research by Northwestern Univ. Sociologist James Rosenbaum.

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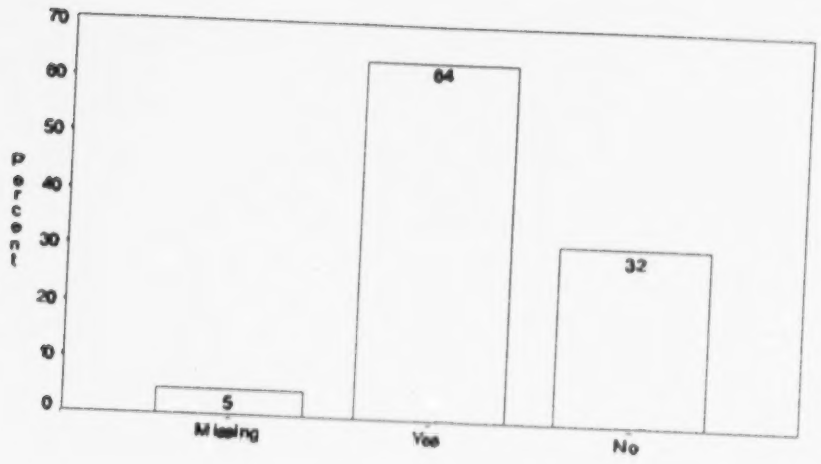

Desired Improvements. Parents believe that the METCO could be substantially improved. Most of the highest priority issues concern staffing and curriculum issues. 42% said that it was a "highest priority" need to hire more minority teachers and administrators while 36% pointed to the need for more multicultural education. Both of these issues were ranked "highest" or "high" priority by more than 70% of the parents as was more diversity awareness training for teachers and administrators, METCO representation on the suburban school board, and counselors more sensitive to children of color. Large majorities also favored more tutoring at METCO Inc. and more after-school activity busses.

The intense demand for METCO opportunities and the high satisfaction with the experience should not obscure the extraordinary sacrifices the METCO students and families make and the considerable obstacles that students face. We have worked with groups of METCO students in a special Saturday program for the past two years and they have discussed their experiences in great

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detail. Families get up at 5 A.M., students may be commuting for three hours a day, students must often adjust to being in a tiny minority and having no teachers from their racial background in a school where most of the children have vastly more affluent families and little sensitivity to the experiences and needs of the METCO kids. METCO students must find ways to live successfully in two different worlds every day of the school year and to deal with a life experience that increasingly separates them from their neighborhood peers as they learn middle class skills and become prepared for much stronger colleges and universities. At a time of adolescent development when social life is extremely important, many of the students go to schools where some feel excluded or ignored. In some schools the students face a negative stereotype in which they may be seen as the likely culprits when something goes wrong. Those who start METCO in high school may also face a tough struggle to overcome a serious gap in preparation. METCO students have to pay a high cost and develop unusual maturity and understanding in order to obtain the kind of suburban educational opportunity taken for granted by most white children.

As we consider the results of METCO and the need for improvements, we should keep in mind the remarkable resilience and determination of these families and students in their day-after-day, year-after-year commitment to crossing the metropolitan color line and obtaining the education and experience they need to succeed in the mainstream of American society. Suburban families might try to imagine how their lives would be affected if they were convinced that the only way for their children to have a reasonable chance for success was to face changes of this magnitude and difficulty. We should also consider what it means about the nature of our metropolitan society that so many caring and involved

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parents and students believe that they must bear these burdens if they are to have a fair chance in college and in life.

Student Survey– In connection with the METCO study, Jennifer Arenson conducted a study of junior and senior students in the METCO program in three suburban high schools in the fall of 1996. The study, which is also released today, was designed to explore issues relating to the parent survey and sometimes used the same questions. A strong response rate of 70% of the students in the grades surveyed was obtained. The survey represents the students at these three schools but not necessarily of the entire METCO student population. The data is most important for raising major issues and either confirming or challenging the perceptions of the METCO parents.

On many issues there is remarkable agreement between students and parents. When asked what were the "three most important reasons why your family enrolled you in METCO, 88% of the students pointed to better education, 26% to the opportunity to learn in a better environment and meet new people, 22% spoke of the value of cultural diversity, and 20% pointed to escaping to a safer and less violent environment. The Boston students had goals that virtually any suburban parent would want for his or her own child.

Although successful integration was not their basic goal, city students saw it as a clear outcome of their METCO experience. 91% of students reported a good or excellent experience in "learning to get along with people from different backgrounds." Many METCO students are assigned to "host families" by the receiving school district and they become acquainted with other suburban families through their children and activities. 85% reported a good or excellent experience with suburban host families and families of friends. (In our focus groups of current METCO parents we found

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some who had been METCO students themselves many years ago and reported a continuing relationship with host families that had lasted for decades and was a very positive experience in their lives.) The fact that there were many friendships does not mean, as Arenson's study points out, that there were not limits to those friendships or that serious racial issues had disappeared.

Suburban citizens may wonder about the degree to which the METCO students actually see a gain from enrollment in a suburban school. In our Saturday sessions with METCO students, they often talked about the dramatic ways in which they would see their lives moving in different and much more hopeful directions than their friends who were very intelligent but did not have the same experiences and their lives were going nowhere.

On the critical issue of academic achievement, 82% of students surveyed reported a good or excellent experience and none saw serious problems in the academic program. This does not mean, of course, that students were not struggling with courses, or that every METCO student was taking full advantage of the offerings of his or her school.

Students were less likely than their parents, however, to believe that their culture was respected in their suburban school. 8% saw serious problems, 39% some problems, and only 6% felt that their schools were doing an excellent job. Many felt that some white students had serious stereotypes about urban blacks and that they needed more knowledge in this area.

One of the findings in David Armor's 1972 article was that black students from the city became more conscious of black culture and concerned about having it in the curriculum than students going to city schools. Armor treated this as a negative consequences of desegregation. In fact, however, it can be seen in another way.

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Most Americans, for example, tend to take their own culture for granted until they visit another society. In that setting recognition and consciousness of the culture intensify and many seek things from home. This does not mean, of course, that they are not enjoying or profiting from the experience abroad or want to go home right away.

Integrationists tend to see this consciousness as a healthy reaction and an important impetus for movement toward more authentic integration in the school. Students and parents raising these issues do not want to return to all black inner city schools, but they would like the schools to become more responsive and more sensitive to students needs and to the realities of a multicultural society.

The key to successful adult life in our contemporary economy is post-secondary education. The prerequisite for many of the best jobs is a BA. It is very important that students be prepared 96% of the junior and senior students were planning to attend a four year college or university. Students who attend integrated high schools are much more likely to finish college than students with the same test scores who attend big city segregated high schools.[8]

Students reported very little serious discrimination from teachers and administrators but considerably more from other students and the suburban police than the parents reported. Only 1% of students reported serious discrimination from teachers, while 48% said that there was none; 1% reported serious discrimination from administrators and staffs and 60% said that

[8]Camburn, 1990; a September 1997 survey of last year's graduates in the large city-suburban transfer program in metropolitan St. Louis reported that 77% of the respondents were actually attending college and that another 11% had enrolled in a trade or vocational post-secondary program, for a total of 88% continuing their education. The survey had a 60% response rate. (Voluntary Interdistrict Coordinating Committee, "VICC Graduate Survey for 1996-1997)

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there was none. (51% reported some discrimination from teachers and 38% from administrators and staff). 0% reported serious discrimination by counselors and 85% said there was none. Since counselors play an extremely important role in plugging students into college opportunities, this is a very important finding.

The highest level of serious discrimination was reported by suburban police--9%, followed by suburban public transit drivers, at 5%. 4% of students saw serious discrimination from other students in the school and 75% reported "some discrimination from fellow students. Students may not have been telling their parents about all the issues they are dealing with in their schools.

Students, like their parents, gave highest priority for improvements in METCO to more multicultural education and more minority teachers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Although many issues that could benefit from further study, this research provides a basis for a some recommendations and our familiarity with the program suggests other issues in need of consideration by policy makers. The recommendations do not grow directly out of the surveys but attempt to apply the lessons of previous desegregation research to issues raised by parents and teachers as well as issues raised by METCO and school staff in discussions relating to parent and student concerns.

1) Critical support services that do much to shape the qualify and impact of the experience should be funded. These should include resources for training staff, for curriculum and materials, and for activities buses that permit full participation in the life

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of the school. A good starting point would be sessions with parents, student, METCO staff, and teachers and administrators in each school exploring possible solutions.

2) experts in interracial schooling should facilitate discussions and planning among students and teachers about how to stop perceived and real discrimination and stereotyping of METCO students by some students.
3) resources should be provided for systematic research on a number of key issues that could not be addressed in this study which are outlined in the following section
4) METCO districts with very few black and Latino teachers should intensify recruitment efforts, encourage METCO students to consider,returning as teachers and explore the possibility of teacher exchanges with Boston
5) Local universities and community groups in Boston should be asked to help with the strengthening of multicultural curricula and activities.

An underlying need is for serious discussion of resources. METCO officials respond to a number of the issues raised by pointing to a budget that is shrinking in real terms. Analysis should examine costs of present programs, cutbacks and their effect, the cost of possible expansion of METCO, the degree to which expenses have been shifted to suburban districts, and what it would cost to have the state pay the share of actual costs it was paying a decade ago.

Housing should be part of the thinking of the future of METCO. Communities and regional fair housing groups could prepare a plan to increase housing opportunities for METCO families and others desiring to live in suburban communities

Future Research Needs. This study answers critical questions about the motivation and experiences of families involved in METCO. Since the parent survey was a census of all METCO parents and there was a very high response rate from most districts, this study provides the opportunity to assess the experience of families within each district and to highlight both accomplishments and issues needing attention. Comparing various districts and studying the most effective and the least effective experiences along various dimensions could help identify features related to success. The preliminary student survey released here could be used as a starting point for a study of all METCO students and combined with evidence on achievement and the effect on college going and later lives through a longitudinal study of METCO students in comparison with a valid control group. Even better would be the creation of some extra METCO slots to be assigned among the eligible population by random assignment techniques that would create a much more powerful basis for reaching firm conclusions.

Before such long-term research could be carried it would be well for school districts and the state department of education to conduct studies using existing course taking and achievement data to begin to understand the existing situation better and identify areas needing attention.

Desegregation should not been seen as benefiting only urban minority children but as offering something very important to suburban students and schools as well. As society becomes much more multiracial and functioning successfully in a diverse settings

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becomes much more important for everyone, it is increasingly necessary to think about and measure benefits for whites and for suburban communities through studies of white students and teachers and community parents.

The best possible research on the impacts of desegregation would follow students through the adult lives and comparing what happens to them to a similar group of students who did not have the METCO experience. Many METCO students and alumni watch closely what is happening to their possibilities compared to those of friends they consider equally talented who did not have the same opportunity and see large differences. The only place where systematic data of this sort exists is in metropolitan Hartford where students were followed for fifteen years in research by Robert Crain that found substantial effects on college, jobs, living in integrated areas as adults, and even on the probability of teenage pregnancy. A study of the lives of METCO alumni many years after the program by Susan Eaton is now underway at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Eaton is finding that METCO alumni often work in settings where ability to cross racial lines effortlessly is very important and that they are quite conscious of the abilities they gained through what where difficult years in METCO. Many remain strongly identified with inner city institutions and programs in Boston.[9]

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[9] Eaton conducted 63 in depth interviews with past METCO participants. Their positive experiences commonly related to interracial friendships and less racial self-consciousness. The negative aspects related to cultural isolation, confusion about racial identity and the persistent stereotypes on the part of whites that manifested themselves in myriad ways. They rarely saw METCO in terms of leaving a "black" community in favor of a white one. It was part of a clear plan for maximizing future options. Families did assume that schools would be better in suburbia and produce better access to college and other opportunities. They describe a process of developing comfort in white settings while holding onto their identity as black men and women.

Their general confidence about their chances for success in predominantly white settings make them willing to enter such settings when they see opportunities there. Often they take on roles later in life in which they acted as a "bridge" between black and white communities, either on college campuses, in their jobs or in community organizations. In fact, many graduates have professional jobs now in which they employ the skill and experience of in bridging two cultures.

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Research is also needed on the nuts and bolts of the program. The program's administrators are aware of many of the issues raised by METCO students and parents we believe they would be open to significant changes if convinced that students could be better served. Data is needed on costs and the resources needed to sustain an effective program and serve more of those wishing to participate.

CONCLUSION

The most basic conclusion of this study is that if we respect the judgment of the students and families that have invested most heavily in this program, it offers an invaluable set of Opportunities. Education policy is an arena in which there are waves of fads, fashionable ideas, and sound bites but very few policies which have the power to sustain strong support and demand in the face of often treacherous external conditions and continuously diminishing resources. Though the program is far from perfect, this is a policy that has been tested and lived out in the lives of thousands of Black Bostonians. It deserves our serious effort to understand it fully, to provide the needed resources to more fully realize its potential, to offer an improved version of this choice to more young people in our urban community, and to think about ways in which we can build successful interracial communities in which such extraordinary efforts are not necessary.

More than 90 percent of those interviewed said they would repeat their METCO experience if they had the choice or would send their child to METCO.

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